

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05378 01 OF 02 140448Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10
LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 OMB-01 SAA-01 SES-02
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 SSM-03 /094 W
-----001077 140529Z /12

R 131457Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9657
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
USINT BAGHDAD
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 05378

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, SY, XF
SUBJECT: QUESTIONS ON PALESTINIAN POPULATION CONCENTRA-
TIONS LOCATED IN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05378 01 OF 02 140448Z

REF: STATE 218639

SYRIAN GOVERNMENT DOES NOT RELEASE STATISTICS ON NUMBERS
OF PALESTINIANS RESIDENT IN SYRIA, NOR DOES IT DISCRIMI-
NATE IN ANY LEGAL FASHION OTHER THAN TO DENY PALESTINIANS
CITIZENSHIP. FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE PEGGED TO SUB-PARAS
REFTEL:

A) NO LESS THAN 250,000 PALESTINIANS ARE RESIDENT IN SYRIA. BIRTH RATE BELIEVED SLIGHTLY LOWER THAN SYRIAN RATE. THERE IS NO UNEMPLOYMENT OF PALESTINIANS OR SYRIANS IN SYRIA.

B) CHARACTERISTICS OF PALESTINIAN WORKERS DOES NOT DIFFER IN ANY SIGNIFICANT RESPECT FROM SYRIAN WORKERS. POSSIBLY SKILL LEVELS MAY BE SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN AVERAGE OF TOTAL SYRIAN WORK FORCE.

C) TOGETHER WITH OTHER SYRIAN WORKERS, MANY PALESTINIANS HAVE LEFT SYRIA FOR HIGHER-PAID EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA.

D) THERE ARE NO LEGAL RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON PALESTINIAN WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES OTHER THAN THOSE IMPOSED BY VIRTUE OF NOT BEING CITIZENS. SOCIALLY, PALESTINIANS ARE ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM SYRIANS. CHILDREN BORN IN SYRIA OF A PALESTINIAN FATHER ARE PALESTINIANS AND CARRY A LAISSEZ-PASSEZ ISSUED BY THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL.

E) SYRIAN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYS PALESTINIANS WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION EXCEPT IN LIMITED NUMBER OF TOP POLICY OR SECURITY POSITIONS. GIVEN SYRIA'S COMMITMENT TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05378 01 OF 02 140448Z

PALESTINIAN CAUSE, WE SEE NO LIKELIHOOD OF A CHANGE IN THIS POLICY IN THE ABSENCE OF A PEACE SETTLEMENT.

F) SYRIANS DO NOT HAVE PROBLEMS WITH PALESTINIAN WORKERS PER SE. PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN A PART OF THE LABOR FORCE SINCE 1948. SYRIAN POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF PALESTINIANS ARE AFFECTED BY POLITICAL, NOT ECONOMIC, FACTORS.

G) EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND TRAINING FOR PALESTINIAN YOUTH IN SYRIA ARE IDENTICAL TO THOSE AVAILABLE TO SYRIANS. WE KNOW OF NO QUOTAS OR OTHER RESTRICTIVE PRACTICES. WE HAVE NO STATISTICS ON PROPORTION OF PALESTINIAN YOUTH ATTENDING HIGH SCHOOL AND HIGHER INSTITUTIONS ABROAD, BUT ASSUME THEY ARE AGAIN SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN SYRIAN AVERAGE.

H) WE KNOW OF NO PLANS FOR SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TO AFFECT THE NUMBER OF WORKING PALESTINIANS IN THE COUNTRY.

I) IN FASHION IDENTICAL TO SYRIAN WORKERS, PALESTINIANS RESIDENT IN SYRIA GO ABROAD TO SEEK HIGHER WAGES. THERE ARE A FEW, PRIMARILY CHRISTIAN MERCHANTS, WHO SEEK TO

LEAVE FOR THE WEST BECAUSE OF FEARS FOR THE FUTURE. HOW-
EVER, SYRIAN MERCHANTS ARE DOING THE SAME.

J) WE HAVE NO IDEA WHATSOEVER OF PERCENTAGE OF PALES-
TINIAN POPULATION STILL LIVING IN REFUGEE CAMPS. CAMPS
IN DAMASCUS, IN FACT, ARE LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM NEIGHBOR-
ING LOWER-CLASS SUBURBS. ONLY ADVANTAGE TO STAYING IN
THE CAMPS IS THAT RENT IS FREE AND HOUSING IS SHORT FOR
EVERYONE IN SYRIA. WE UNDERSTAND LAND ON WHICH CAMPS ARE
LOCATED IS PRIVATELY OWNED ON LONG-TERM RENTS TO SYRIAN
GOVERNMENT AND COULD PROBABLY NOT BE TRANSFERRED TO CUR-
RENT TENANTS. PALESTINIANS LIVING IN THE CITY ARE COM-
PLETELY INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THEIR NEIGHBORS AND NOT
CONCENTRATED IN NEIGHBORHOODS.
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PAGE 04 DAMASC 05378 01 OF 02 140448Z

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05378 02 OF 02 140448Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 DAMASCUS 05378

K) THE FACTORS THAT ARE AGAINST ASSIMILATION OF
PALESTINIANS INTO THE LOCAL SOCIETY ARE ESSENTIALLL
POLITICAL. HOWEVER, IT IS APPARENT THAT NEITHER THE
PALESTINIANS NOR THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ANY DESIRE TO
CHANGE THEM. SEELYE
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05378 02 OF 02 140448Z

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